

**FEMA**

Building on Success

FEMA Best Practices in Emergency Response Evolutions for the 2005 Hurricane Season and Beyond

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's response to the extraordinary series of storms during the 2004 hurricane season was the largest mobilization of emergency response and disaster recovery resources in the history of FEMA – exceeding operational responses to the 1994 Northridge Earthquake and the September 11, 2001 Terrorist Attacks.

The four hurricanes that hammered the eastern United States last year were the most wide-spread and intense series of disasters in FEMA's nearly 27 years of existence. FEMA responded to a record-setting 27 total major declared disasters for hurricane-related damage in 15 states, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands (an area of more than 600,000 square miles). Florida was hit by four hurricanes and Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia were also declared disasters due to damages from the storms.

FEMA's response to last year's hurricanes resulted in the activation of the National Emergency Operations Center and other operations centers for more than 55 days - their longest continuous activation ever. As systems, programs and operations were tested like never before, FEMA will be able to better respond to disasters in the future and better-aid disaster victims for years to come. In addition to program evolutions inspired by the 2004 hurricane season, FEMA is always adopting new technologies and techniques to help communities respond and recover from the devastating effects of hurricanes or any disaster – wherever or whenever they strike.

The following are key elements in FEMA's "Building on Success" plan for the 2005 hurricane season and any future disasters. They are program evolutions that will better serve disaster victims no matter where or when the next disaster strikes:

Pre-Positioning Disaster Supplies

2004: Before the first hurricane made landfall, FEMA had begun preparations by strategically locating key assets in and around states likely to be impacted. Through the ensuing onslaught of Hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne, FEMA pushed supplies into hard-hit areas, working with state and local officials to identify and prioritize their needs.

The Pre-Positioned Disaster Supplies (PPDS) Program was developed to pre-position life-saving/life-sustaining disaster equipment and supplies as close to a potential disaster site as possible. PPDS positions supplies in containers on the ground in a state so they are ready to be mobilized and put to use wherever and whenever disaster strikes. During the 2004 hurricanes, 17 PPDS Containers were provided to support 8,500 disaster victims (each container supported 500 people) in several hurricane-affected states (resources in the containers included cots, blankets, first aid kits, personal hygiene kits, tents, portable toilets, power generators, tool kits and fire extinguishers).

- 2005:** PPDS will continue to be used to quickly mobilize life-sustaining resources to wherever disasters occur – for not only those states that prepare for hurricanes, but those that are often effected by earthquakes, tornadoes and other anticipated disasters.

National Disaster Medical System

- 2004:** During the 2004 hurricanes, the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) teams provided medical treatment for nearly 10,000 patients. Now under the Department of Homeland Security, FEMA was able to better coordinate the deployment of these medical assistance teams to reach into hurricane effected states and treat thousands of disaster victims. (NDMS includes about 8,000 medical and support personnel from across the country who assist local medical care providers when an emergency exceeds the scope of a community's hospital and healthcare resources.)
- 2005:** National Disaster Medical System teams will continue to be deployed to disaster situations where state and local officials need coordinated national medical support - during the 2005 hurricane season and beyond.

Web-Based Application Process

- 2004:** On October 5, 2004, between disaster declarations for Tropical Storm Ivan in New York and Tropical Storm Frances in South Carolina, FEMA developed and released its online registration option. Within eight weeks, over 21,000 applicants used FEMA's web-based registration process to apply for disaster assistance; and to further expedite disaster assistance applications, FEMA loaded the web-based registration to laptop computers, allowing area residents without phone service or utilities to register from FEMA Disaster Recovery Centers.
- 2005:** FEMA will continue to use this successful web-based application process for the 2005 hurricane season and in all future disasters as another tool to speed recovery assistance to impacted individuals and households.

Emergency Group Sites

- 2004:** Due to the severe devastation of four hurricanes hitting back to back, hundreds of area residents were unable to return to their homes last year and many could not even find temporary housing accommodations. Some were forced to sleep in emergency shelters, which are not intended as a viable long-term housing solution. To transition these individuals out of emergency shelters until adequate temporary lodging could be acquired, FEMA introduced Emergency Group Sites (EGS) as an interim sheltering solution. (EGS are clusters of travel trailers that can be set-up in a few days with fully self-contained utility systems.)
- 2005:** FEMA is currently refining interim sheltering options and intends to utilize EGS again in future large-scale recovery operations, whether that occurs in 2005 or the more distant future.

Housing Strike Teams

- 2004:** In Florida, FEMA deployed Housing Strike Teams to the state's 12 hardest-hit counties to work directly with key local officials on expediting the emergency housing program. The teams included representatives from FEMA, HUD, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and highly skilled private sector consultants who worked to identify and resolve large-scale housing issues. Through their efforts, FEMA housed more than 13,000 families in fewer than 90 days.

2005: FEMA is in the process of further developing multiple standing Housing Strike Teams for use in future large-scale recovery operations whether they occur in 2005 or beyond.

Expanded Mutual Aid Assistance

2004: Due to the scope and magnitude of the 2004 hurricanes, FEMA realized the necessity to expand the reimbursement program for costs incurred by local governments who loan their first responders and emergency resources to aid their neighboring cities or counties during a disaster (called "mutual aid assistance"). FEMA expanded the national mutual aid policy to allow local governments to be eligible for mutual aid reimbursement even if a mutual aid agreement was not in place before a disaster declaration. This means that entities that did not have an agreement already set up with their neighbor before a disaster occurred, can request that FEMA reimburse them for eligible costs.

2005: This is now a national policy that will be used in all future disaster declarations to assist state and local governments with disaster recovery.

We Continue to Build on Our Success

Through the efforts of thousands of dedicated disaster workers last year, FEMA delivered aid more quickly and more efficiently than ever before. In every major disaster, the Agency is confronted with new and sometimes recurring circumstances that tax our system in ways that are sometimes unanticipated. By design, FEMA remains flexible and adjusts guidelines during disasters to ensure a quick response, but also conducts thorough systems reviews afterwards, seeking improvements for the future. As FEMA looks ahead to the 2005 hurricane season, we now have the experience gained during an historic 2004 hurricane season to add to our 26 years of disaster experience.

The following is a list of areas where we continue to build on our successes for all future disasters:

More Detailed Documentation: FEMA is working to use new technologies and guidelines to better document damages to homes and personal possessions. More detailed documentation will further ensure that individuals receive necessary funds for eligible disaster expenses in an expeditious manner.

Quality Control of Inspections: FEMA is developing new technology and procedures to improve quality control of inspections. Our ultimate goal is to improve the accuracy of inspections without incurring any delays in providing disaster assistance.

Contract Oversight: FEMA is currently evaluating contract requirements to ensure better training and guidance on the part of our contractors when hiring inspectors and other individuals working to assist disaster victims.